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SUBJECT: CFC TEAM VISITS MUHAJERIA AND HEARS SLA DEMANDS

REF: KHARTOUM 0884

11. (SBU) Members of the Force Headquarters Ceasefire Commission (CFC) flew to Muhajeria Military Group Site (MGS) June 5 to interview witnesses to the May 30 vehicle collision between the African Union Mission to Sudan (AMIS) and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA)/Minawi (reftel). The team hoped to interview two of the uninjured passengers from the SLA vehicle about the collision and dispatched the CFC SLA representatives to retrieve them from a nearby village. After waiting nearly three hours, the representatives returned empty-handed, saying that one of the SLA witnesses was on his way while the other was unavailable.

12. (SBU) The team interviewed the driver of the vehicle behind the armored personnel carrier that had collided with the SLA vehicle. As instructed, he came prepared with a written statement and was then questioned by the investigating team. He answered calmly and kept to the facts he remembered but also noted when he wasn't sure of some of his answers. The illiterate SLA witness brought a statement that his legal advisor had written. He claimed the APC driver had intended to hit the SLA vehicle but could not explain how he came to that conclusion.

13. (SBU) The SLA representatives then introduced the local SLA legal advisor, Othman Mohamed Haroun and the Muhajeria ground commander, Ibrahim Hasan. Haroun wanted to know who comprised the investigating team, which direction the report would go, the duration of the investigation and how the committee would provide compensation for the SLA deaths. Haroun claimed that "under international law" the criminal - apparently the APC driver in his view - and the APC itself should be put into the custody of the police. Haroun stressed that AMIS' vehicles would only be returned when his questions were answered. The investigation team leader said that he would forward Haroun's concerns to the Deputy Force Commander. Comment: While considering the collision "criminal," Haroun did not regard the shooting of the three AMIS soldiers and the seizure of 13 AMIS vehicles the same way. End Comment.

14. (SBU) The Muhajeria Group Site Commander, Zambian LTC Kaumbasango, told S/CRS Poloff he was frustrated by the incident because it made AMIS look weak and could embolden the SLA to take more drastic action. He said that an SLA soldier had driven one of the stolen AMIS vehicles to a small shop outside the MGS front gate, purchased something, and left. Kaumbasango described this as an attempt to antagonize his soldiers. He was puzzled about the SLA's motives. Kaumbasango explained that the surrounding area was controlled by the Birgeit tribe, the Arab Maalia tribe, and the Sudanese Government. Without AMIS, he said, the Zaghawa SLA would be wiped out by their neighbors. He said his relations with the previous SLA commander had been cordial, but they had deteriorated after the arrival of the new commander from North Darfur two months earlier.

FERNANDEZ